DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 129 EA 019 775

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TITLE Support for Clinical Experiences in Educational Administration Preparation Programs.
PUB DATE Oct 87
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council on Educational Administration (Charlottesville, VA, October 30-November 1, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Experiential Learning; *Field Experience Programs; *Internship Programs; *School Administration

ABSTRACT

School administration is an applied field requiring synthesis of ideas from diverse sources and application of these ideas in skillful practice. Administrator preparation programs must include opportunities for new administrators to practice their craft in nonthreatening environments and share experiences with peers while being supervised by recognized experts. This paper attempts to (1) identify ways to provide opportunities for clinical practice in administrator preparation programs and (2) stimulate others to consider innovative ways to support these expensive, but necessary experiential components. After defining various categories of commitment (institutional, local education agency, personal, professional, and societal), the paper explores possible sources of support linked to these categories. For example, the institution offering the preparation program has considerable responsibility for building a strong clinical program through adequate budgeting, contracts and partnerships with local school systems, generation of new funding, and other means. Local education agencies can express commitment by reserving funding to fill a few teaching and central office positions through rotating internships. Individuals might seek specific internship experience before entering a preparation program, defer part of their normal vacation time, or attend annual meetings of professional associations as part of their clinical program. Numerous suggestions are also provided for professors, academic departments, and external agencies committed to clinical practice for administrators. (MLH)

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SUPPORT FOR CLINICAL EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS

by

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Support for Clinical Experiences in Educational Administration Preparation Programs*

Introduction

School administration is an applied field. Skillful practitioners must draw from such diverse fields as Human Relations, Sociology, Technology, and proven elements of past practice as they set about the really important task of running the schools of this nation. The responsibility of synthesizing ideas from many sources and applying those ideas in skillful practice is enormous. The preparation of leaders for tomorrow's schools must include opportunities for new practitioners to practice the craft of administration in non-threatening environments under the supervision of recognized experts and to share these experiences in common but structured ways with their neophyte peers. A complete preparation program for an applied profession must incorporate planned and structured procedures for inducting new practitioner into the appropriate use of proven practices and for synthesizing information from many fields.

An individual may learn the application of skills and theories independently, but applications certainly can be learned better when preparation programs provide planned opportunities for observation, demonstration, guided practice, and helpful criticism. Given the importance of clinical practice, faculty in institutions preparing administrators and supervisors need to find ways to provide that clinical experience. The structure and sequencing of clinical experiences, including such things as visits, demonstrations, practica, field problems, extended periods of guided practice, and other strategies are not the focus of this brief paper. The paper has two purposes: 1) to identify some ways to provide opportunities for clinical practice in planned programs for those persons preparing to run America's schools, and 2) to stimulate others to

EA 019 775

*By C.M. Achilles, Educational Leadership, College of Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 37996-3400. Thanks to those who have provided guidance and ideas in the preparation of this paper. UCEA Convention, Charlottesville, VA, 10/31/87.

11/87

consider innovative ways to support expensive but necessary elements of preparation programs. A critical concern, given the finite funds available for preparation programs, is to identify sources of support for meaningful clinical experiences. (Bake sales or candy sales probably won't get the job done!) The rest of this paper explores some ideas about sources of support for clinical experiences. The ideas, although grouped into categories, are not listed in any order of importance.

Much of the preparation for new administrators occurs in an institution of higher education. If clinical practice is to be part of planned preparation program for new school administrators, then the institution itself must support this program element. This is institutional commitment.

School districts educate America's children. These districts employ the graduates of preparation programs; they also look to the purveyors of preparation programs to participate in continuing professional and personal growth activities with their practicing educators. In this regard, the local education agencies (LEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) should form partnerships to improve preparation programs. To the degree that LEAs become full partners in preparation programs, they are displaying local education agency commitment.

Preparation for school administration is a personal choice that requires commitment to a profession. Thus, one source of support for clinical practice is the student preparing for the profession. This is personal commitment.

Those whose metier is educating administrators for America's schools have a personal and professional stake in the improvement of preparation programs. Professors gain intrinsic and extrinsic rewards from being associated with high quality programs that prepare excellent administrators for the schools. Part of the professor's (individual and collective, as in a Department) professional challenge should be to improve the preparation programs. This is professional commitment.

Society in general benefits from better prepared administrators and better run schools. If this is true, then yet another source of support for those preparing to administer tomorrow's schools will be agencies external to the preparation institution and separate from the individual. There is a broad range of agencies and possibilities. This is a societal commitment.

This paper presumes and assumes at least five possible sources of support for the clinical portion of a strong preparation program. Those five sources of support, each to be addressed separately, include the institution offering the preparation program, the local school systems that employ administrators, the individual preparing for the profession, the professors and professionals working in the preparation programs, and other external sources. Ideas described in each section may pertain to one or another institution or individual in varying degrees.

I. The Institution Offering the Preparation Program

The institution offering the preparation program has considerable responsibility for supporting all aspects of a strong preparation program. One aspect of an administrator preparation program are the clinical experiences needed to help accommodate or blend theory and practice and to help students learn how to practice the art of administration. This is reasonable institutional commitment to an excellent program.

1. Institutions generally charge tuition for course credits. Since credits are typically given for clinical experiences, the institution must provide a portion of its operating budget to support those clinical experiences in the same way that it supports other high cost, low enrollment courses.

2. Institutions should seek contracts with local school systems to help those school systems generate data for policy decisions and to solve identified problems. As part of these contracts, institutions must consider the opportunity to incorporate clinical experiences for students with the activities of the contract.

3. Institutions of higher education can seek "partnerships" with local school systems for the purpose of identifying centers for clinical practice for school administration. These centers will be staffed by outstanding

practicing administrators who will serve as mentors and coordinate aspects of the clinical experiences.

4. Deans of Colleges of Education can carry to upper-level administrators the need for extended funds to support clinical practice for educational administrators, arguing eloquently that school administrators, no less than future physicians, must have opportunities for clinical practice. Deans should use education's typically low funding and high credit-hour return as part of the basis for stronger fiscal support.

5. Departments can divide their traditional assistantship funds in ways that will support clinical practice. Rather than distributing funds in the usual way (to one student for a full year) departments will explore new arrangements to encourage clinical experiences as part of full-time preparation programs. This may incorporate short-term support to several people.

6. Institutions need to seek creative ways to implement the notion of clinical practice. Perhaps experiences can be provided in business or industry settings that would allow trainees to use vacation time from school for short and single-purpose clinical experiences.

7. Universities need once again to combine the skills of graduate students with the element of training by involving graduate students as part of faculty teams that provide consultant services to school systems. Faculty/student teams are good sources of guided clinical experiences.

8. Departments can generate funds through special accounts 1) donated by graduates, 2) achieved by payment for special services, or 3) obtained through reimbursement for special courses provided as "overload" to keep new ideas/information in the hands of practitioners.

9. Institute or expand the school study council concept as a base for coordinated field study. Allocate portions of the study council funds to support interns or sites for clinical practice.

10. Work with the development office or alumni association to establish a fund specifically to support clinical practice. Perhaps have a specific fund-raising drive for this purpose.

11. Establish a "Service Bureau" with venture capital. Work completed through the service bureau would return money to the bureau. "Profits" from the work of advanced students in the bureau would build a fund to capitalize the field or clinical aspect of preparation programs. (Note the recent FIPSE interest in community service as a way to provide some fiscal support for students.)

12. Etc.

II. The Local Education Agency (LEA) Commitment.

The LEAs employ administrators. Some LEAs may designate specific individuals to receive advanced administrative preparation at the IHE. If they do, they should have some voice in the preparation program content, and especially

in the field or clinical component. The LEAs can assist the clinical component in many ways. (Some ways appear elsewhere with slightly different foci).

1. Local school systems can reserve the funding for one central office position each year to be distributed for interns to provide specific services to that school system.

2. Local Education Agencies (LEAs), especially with the impending shortage of teachers, can reserve one or more teaching positions for rotating internships. Perhaps four-fifths of the money for the position can go directly to the intern, reserving approximately one-fifth to support the cost of operating and supervising the internship. (This model is followed by the University of Virginia, among others).

3. Designate certain positions--e.g., federal projects, research, supervisor, assistant to..., etc.--for internships. The interns would receive teacher-level pay; fund differentials would help support the internship (travel, supervision, special projects).

4. Allocate certain tasks to be done through service bureaus at the IHE, specifically to be done by persons preparing for educational administrative positions.

5. Work with IHEs in developing partnerships. Designate some of the LEA's expert administrators to serve on committees at the IHE. Allow the LEA's best administrators to be the mentor or field supervisor for specific interns. If the LEA is large enough, it may become a Field Training Center for several interns at one time.

III. The Individual's Commitment

Preparation for a profession, even one with limited remuneration possibilities, requires considerable individual commitment. Students must expect to spend some of their preparation program time serving at less than their usual amount of pay. In doing this they will defer income. In return they will gain experience and professional demeanor. This is individual commitment and personal recognition of the need for exceptional preparation programs.

1. Individuals might, prior to entering a preparation program, seek specific internship experiences as one pre-condition to admission in the full-time program. These might be experiences in their home school districts; they might be activities that would help the home school district in some significant manner. Conversation and planning with a superintendent, other administrators, or the school might identify such opportunities. (Enrollment trends, policy manual, etc.)

2. Individuals might defer part of their normal vacation time and set it aside for unpaid clinical experiences. Since this experience would come at

a vacation time, the experience would logically come at a non-education site.

3. Individuals might remain active in their professional associations while on full-time study, and incorporate the annual meetings of those associations as part of their clinical experience program.

IV. Professional Commitment

Professors, individually and collectively acting as a department, have a vested interest in excellent preparation programs. Professors and departments will benefit from a professional model of preparation where attention is directed at three program elements: academics, skill development and clinical practice. The academic and skill development components will not be difficult to refine for elements of each are already in place. The notion of expanded clinical practice will be a radical departure for many departments and its benefits may need to be demonstrated to upper-level administrators at IHEs. Thus the individual professors and the departments will need to initiate innovative programs at the outset to support the needed clinical practice opportunities. This is professional commitment.

1. Conduct summer (or other time) institutes and return profits to a departmental fund to support clinical practice. Operate a special seminar where each department member contributes in his/her area of speciality as a way to keep practitioners abreast of newest research and theory. Direct income to the departmental fund to support clinical practice.

2. Develop grants and contracts. Topics of research and development may advance knowledge about preparation and clinical practice: study relative merits of varying clinical models; generate a clinical knowledge base for the profession; generate systematic case study literature for use in preparation.

3. Support fund-raising events of a social, cultural and/or professional nature (dinners, theater groups, etc.) for friends of the department as a way to initiate the clinical-practice fund.

4. Ask individual professors to contribute systematically portions of their other-than-salary income to a fund to support clinical practice. The department may, for example, jointly produce a monograph and have profits returned to the fund; professors who get students help in preparing manuscripts may have a percent of royalties credited to a department fund.

5. (See also the sections on Institutional Commitment and LEA Commitment).

V. The Commitment of Other Agencies/Individuals

Numerous external agencies and groups have a vital stake in improving administrator preparation programs. Opportunities for external agencies to support clinical experiences are extremely diverse and numerous. Some that come to mind are the following.

1. State Education Agencies (SEAs) can provide funds to encourage advanced doctoral students to solve policy problems for the State Education Agency. Activities might take the form of surveys, preparing data for legislative reports, and things of that nature. These "for pay" experiences will involve SEA staff, professors, and students in helping improve education within the state, and will provide contexts for clinical practice.

2. Businesses and industries, in the current spirit of partnership, can provide specific clinical experience opportunities in such areas as Technology, Management Systems, Public Relations, Marketing.

3. The Federal Government can provide support for clinical practice through grants to states, perhaps based on the number of school-aged children, to be distributed to major institutions of higher education that will use the funds for clinical experiences.

4. Establish a fund (similar to a "chair") in the name of some important business or wealthy administrator. Funds available from the endowment would support clinical practice.

5. Then, of course, there is the idealistic notion of grants specifically for clinical practice. Foundations. Government.

6. Some blend of funds available for cooperative services, much like the idea of cooperative education for other students, may be one realistic way to go. This could be a state or federal grant program.

7. Regional agencies, especially the federally supported educational laboratories, may offer fertile grounds for cooperative endeavors with institutions of higher education. Some already support extern projects.

8. The various professional associations have a stake in the preparation of top-quality administrators. Professional associations could make part or full-time internship experiences at the national and/or state levels. A portion of state, regional and/or national conventions could be reserved for clinical experience review and discussion. A portion of Association's programs, or the associations' continuing education agendas, can be devoted to clinical practice.

Since the issue of clinical practice for school administration has neither been researched nor identified clearly, it is certain that there should be some planned procedures for evaluating the variety of options available to implement

the idea of clinical practice. Certainly, as preparation programs include a major segment of clinical practice as part of a planned preparation program, there will be coordinated efforts to review and assess the impact of various clinical practice approaches. There will also be some structures and systematic procedures for exchanging information about the apparent successes (or lack of successes) involved with the different models. This recommendation strays from the brief paper's major thesis but should be addressed soon.

Undoubtedly the first line of activity and energy must be professors of educational administration. They will have to exert the leadership in any (or all) of the steps to develop fiscal support for clinical practice. Therefore, each of the recommendations, whether under the heading of professional commitment or any other heading, should be considered something that the professors should initiate. Interesting notion--professors of educational administration actively leading a new movement. Who knows where this might lead?

REFERENCES

No specific references are listed. There are several reasons for this. The paper is a collection of ideas from several sources. Dr. Paula Silver commented on an earlier version, as did members of the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The paper is only a working draft at this stage. The paper contains ideas presented in several other places in different forms.

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